

Terry Lenamon on the Death Penalty

Sidebar with a Board Certified Expert Criminal Trial Attorney



Terence M. Lenamon is a Florida Bar certified expert in the area of criminal trial law. With over 17 years experience he has built a reputation as one of Florida's most respected criminal defense lawyers. His defense has been sought by many high-profile clients and has led him through 20 first-degree murder trials and eight death penalty cases. That experience has brought him national recognition as a go-to commentator on death penalty issues. He is the force behind both deathpenaltyblog.com and Florida Capital Resource Center (floridacapitalresourcecenter.org), and can be reached at terry@lenamonlaw.com.

[California Death Penalty: Guest Blogger Asks How Would You Spend \\$64 Million?](#)

Posted on August 18, 2010 by [Terry Lenamon](#)

Once again, we welcome James Clark, Death Penalty Field Organizer for the ACLU of Southern California as we repost his recent article dealing with the financial realities of capital punishment upon a state's budget.

In the past, we've pointed to the obvious money motive for California - and other states - to end the death penalty on merely a bottom line, dollars and cents, approach. (See, e.g., [California Could Save \\$1 Billion By Abolishing Death Penalty. How Bad Will It Get B4 They Do?](#))

However, today Mr. Clark provides us with the perspective of a Californian, speaking to his neighbors and friends who are living in the beautiful state we all know is facing financial ruin.

Here is James Clark's article (with his approval, of course). It's worth your time to read it:

How Would You Spend \$64 Million?

by: ACLU

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By James Clark, Death Penalty Field Organizer, ACLU of Southern California

Remember that episode of The Simpsons where Homer is so broke he breaks into his daughter's piggy bank, only to find it full of IOUs from himself?

On Wednesday, that scene was reenacted in Sacramento, with Gov. Schwarzenegger playing the role of Homer. The governor announced that [he would be "borrowing" \\$64 million](#) from the General Fund in order to move forward with one of his pet projects, the construction of a new death row facility at San Quentin. And \$64 million is just the tip of the iceberg. Altogether, the new facility is expected to total upwards of \$400 million. That's half a million dollars per prison cell — roughly the cost of a nice house in California.

Of course, [the General Fund is virtually broke already](#), so our governor is borrowing against nonexistent budget. And didn't Gov. Schwarzenegger threaten that he wouldn't sign a budget at all? Every government agency in the state is in fiscal emergency, our social safety net is in tatters, and the state is weeks away from paying state employees with IOUs.

Which is why building a new death row is exactly what we don't need need right now.

California has by far the largest and most costly death row in the country, with over 700 inmates, nearly double the closest runner-up. All of these inmates live in a prison that predates the Civil War. And its resident population keeps climbing: Some California counties are sending even more inmates to death row, ignoring the fact that nearly everyone on California's death row dies of natural causes, just like people sentenced to

life without parole. Last year, California sentenced more people to death than any state in the country, with Los Angeles County alone sending more people to death row than the entire state of Texas.

Those death sentences come with a steep price tag. Each one costs at least \$1.1 million more than a trial seeking permanent imprisonment. But that's just the trial cost for each death penalty prosecution paid by the county. The cost for the entire death penalty system — paid by the state's General Fund — only mounts from there. With constitutionally-mandated appeals, housing, and upkeep on our current dilapidated death row facility, the annual cost of California's death penalty is \$126 million per year.

Plus, there's that new death row facility at \$400 million. All told, that's \$1 billion in five years.

That's the amount the governor could save California's taxpayers if he [would cut the death penalty](#) and convert all of those costly death sentences to permanent imprisonment. All without releasing a single prisoner and ensuring swift and certain justice for murder victims and their families. Permanent imprisonment saves money, saves time, and avoids the decades of turmoil from drawn out death-penalty appeals.

So where would you like to see Gov. Schwarzenegger spend that \$64 million from the California budget, instead of building a new death-row facility? Post your ideas in the comments section, then Tweet the governor and tell him how he should spend it! Tweet @Schwarzenegger Say No to Death Row! Spend #64million on [insert your preferred state program] #cabudget.